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ABSTRACT

A stylistic device that has been used by many authors over the years is to alternate the point of view between two or more characters. Authors of young adult novels choose this technique of multiple narrative voices for a variety of reasons. Multiple voices offer a challenge to many young adult readers because the point of view is much more complex than what they see in most young adult novels. Inexperienced or reluctant readers may not enjoy such books, but for other readers the shifting perspective can quicken the pace of the novel. (An annotated bibliography of 15 young adult novels using multiple voices is included). (RS)

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MULTIPLE VOICES IN YOUNG ADULT NOVELS

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MULTIPLE VOICES IN YOUNG ADULT NOVELS

The narrator as we all know, is the person telling the story. Authors of young adult books will sometimes tell their story from the point of view of one character using the first person narrative, or perhaps third person limited. Still other novels are written using an omniscient narrator, allowing the reader to get into the thoughts and feelings of many characters. A stylistic device that has been used by many authors over the years is to alternate the point of view between two or more characters. Sometimes narrative voice changes within a chapter. Usually the reader knows that this is happening because there is a space break in the type set, the style of the type set changes, or the texts are separated by symbols or drawings. This particular technique is not used that often by authors of young adult books. Instead, many of these authors will alternate narrators by chapters, labeling the chapter with the name of the

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character who is telling the story. Other writers become more sophisticated in their narrative techniques as shown with the books in the attached bibliography.

Authors choose this technique of multiple narrative voices for a variety of reasons. Multiple voices offer a challenge to many young adult readers because the point of view is much more complex than what they see in most young adult novels. This stylistic device can add that extra depth in plot and character development. The shifting perspective can quicken the pace of the novel, building momentum so that many readers are compelled to read the book in one sitting. Inexperienced or reluctant readers may not enjoy such books. But for mature readers, these novels with multiple voices offer the icing on the cake, so to speak. As Rebecca J. Lukens says in her book, **A Critical Handbook of Children' Literature,** we read for two reasons: pleasure and understanding of humankind. What greater joy is there for an avid reader than to combine these two reasons with the challenge of reading a book with multiple voices.

Robert Cormier's **Fade** (Delacorte, 1988) is perhaps the most complex of all the books discussed here. The book is divided into sections labeled Paul, Susan and Ozzie. In the section labeled "Paul" it is 1938 and

Paul is 13 years old and telling the story in first person. In the section labeled "Susan" the time shifts to 1988. Susan is a distant relative of Paul's. She tells the story in first person, although a portion of this section is told in first person by Paul's cousin Jules. As Susan reads a manuscript written by Paul, Paul resumes telling the story as an adult in 1963. This section is then labeled 'Paul.' In the section labeled "Ozzie", the reader hears the story of Ozzie, but Paul as an adult is again the narrator in both first and third person. We see and hear Ozzie's voice through Paul's writing. Finally, Susan's voice ends the book in an epilogue.

In Alice Childress's book **Rainbow Jordan** (Coward, 1981), the story alternates between three characters: fourteen year old Rainbow Jordan, her mother, Kathie Jordan, and Josephine Lamont, a foster mother.

The narrative voice in **Wilderness Peril** by Thomas J. Dygard (Morrow, 1985) also alternates among three peoples. Todd and Mike are two recent high school graduates enjoying their last outing together before they go their separate ways to college. They stumble upon a large sum of money hidden by an airplane highjacker. Their story is meshed with highjacker's story. In addition, the story is also being told from the point of view of the law enforcement official who is trying to apprehend the highjacker.

Lynn Hall also uses three narrators in her book **The Leaving** (Scribner, 1980). The story is written in third person limited, and shifts by chapter between 18 year old Roxanne Armstrong, her mother Thora, and her father Clete. The last page of the novel is unique in that it is written in third person omniscient.

In her first novel **Soul Daddy,** (HBJ, 1992) Jacqueline Roy employs a narrative voice that moves among three female characters. Hanna and Rosie Curren are the fifteen-year-old twin daughters of a white mother and a black father, a father whom they have never met, as he left before they were even born. Suddenly their father is back in their lives, bringing with him his daughter Nicola, who is only months younger than the twins. Nicola's mother was black. Nicola is the third narrator in the story.

In **A Stranger Calls Me Home** (Houghton Mifflin, 1992) by Deborah Savage, the author captures the feelings of each character by alternating the voice of the narrator among all three characters changing with each chapter. Paul always tells the story is first person, while Simon and Fiona's chapters are written in third person limited.

Jane Yolen wrote **The Gift of Sara Barker** in 1981 (Viking). The story takes place in the spring of 1854, and is told in the alternating voices of Abel Church, age 16 and Sarah Barker, age 14. However, there

are three chapters labeled "meeting" and these are told from the point of view of various Shakers who live in the community with Abel and Sarah.

Some authors use two narrative voices. Usually they alternate the narrators by chapters as in Pam Conrad's **Taking The Ferry Home** (Harper and Row, 1988.) This story alternates between the two 16 year old females, Ali and Simone in first-person narratives.

Silver Kiss (Delacorte Press, 1990) was Annette Curtis Klause's first book. She also chose to alternate the narrators by chapters, but she used the third person limited voice. In addition one of her characters was male and one female. It is easy for the reader to identify who is telling the story because the chapters are labeled either Zoe or Simon.

A modern classic in young adult literature is Paul Zindel's **The Pigman** (Harper and Row, 1968.) Zindel allowed John Conlan and Lorraine Jensen tell their story in alternate chapters, too.

Two other authors also tell their stories using double narrators, but they add a twist by also placing the narrators in two different time periods. In Gary Paulsen's **Canyons** (Delacorte, 1990) the third person narrative voice alternates between Coyote Runs in 1864 and Brennan Cole in present time. With J. Alison James' **Sing for A Gentle Rain** (Atheneum, 1990) one narrator is James, a young man who tells his story

in the odd numbered chapters. It is present time and the story takes place in the southeast corner of Utah. The even numbered chapters are told from the point of view of Spring Rain, an Anasazi Indian. The geographical location is the same, but the story takes place in the 13th Century. Eventually the two people come together as James is transported back in time to the 13th Century and then there is a single narrator. Near the end of the book, James moves back into his own time.

In Berlie Doherty's **Dear Nobody** (Orchard, 1992) we see still another variation to the narrative style. This story is also told by two narrators, always in first person. Chris, an 18 year old young man, is telling the main story as a flashback. His story is dovetailed with a story that comes from letters written by his girlfriend Helen. These letters are addressed to **Dear Nobody**, her unborn child.

Cynthia Rylant wrote **A Kindness** (Orchard) in1988. The numbered chapters in this book are told in third person by fifteen year old Chip Becker. The unnumbered chapters are told in third person by Chip's mother. Chapter is six is unique because it is told in first person by Chip as he is writing in a journal.

Fell Down (HarperCollins, 1991) by M. E. Kerr is different yet again. This book is unique in that it has paired double chapters. In the first

chapter that is labeled "one," it is 1981 and John Fell, a 17 year old, is telling the story in first person. The second chapter which is also labeled "one," is told in third person by someone known as "the mouth" and this story takes place twenty years earlier. This pattern of paired chapters continues throughout the book.

If you are looking for something different, a new twist for sharing or studying young adult literature, try the challenge of these books with multiple voices.